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RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
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RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE  
RUCOGCA/COMNAVBASE GUANTANAMO BAY CU IMMEDIATE  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHMFISS/AFSPC COMMAND CENTER PETERSON AFB CO IMMEDIATE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RUCOWCV/CCGDSEVEN MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000965

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DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/02/2017

TAGS: [CU](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: DISSIDENTS PUSH ENVELOPE WHILE REGIME ADJUSTS  
TACTICS

Classified By: COM: Michael E. Parmly: For reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (C) SUMMARY: Leading dissident Martha Beatriz Roque organized a protest on 27 September in front of the Ministry of Justice. She handed to officials a letter for the Minister demanding the release of all political prisoners. Accompanied by eight other dissidents, MBR waited for four hours in front of the Ministry for a response. The police then placed the protesters in a bus and drove them to their homes. Twenty five to fifty more people were detained by police to prevent their participation in the protest. All were released without charges within twenty four hours. Some of the protesters who resisted the police vigorously were struck. None is known to have sustained a serious injury. Despite an intended high level of provocation, the regime showed comparative restraint possibly due to fears of adverse international reaction. MBR hopes to escalate this style of demonstration in the future. End Summary

12. (SBU) Hoping to take advantage of the GOC recent attempts to court world opinion with important meetings coming up in Europe and the UN, MBR proposed to deliver a letter to the Minister of Justice demanding the release of all political prisoners while also presenting a list of the names and the identity card numbers of those who were participating in the protest. Though the date was not set until the last moment, security forces knew about the protests well in advance and apparently detained some 20 to 30 people from at least 3 cities while en route to the event. For public consumption, MBR wanted to capitalize on Pres. Bush's UN speech, stating that she was showing that the US President was wrong that Cubans could not protest. In fact she expected a swift repressive response. The protest seemed hastily organized. The same Pol officers saw many leading dissidents, such as Francisco Chaviano and Oswaldo Paya, who had no idea that MBR planned such a demonstration. Laura Pollan of Damas de Blanco told Pol Off that she disapproved tactically of the demonstration but together with fellow Damas member Bertha Soler decided on Thursday afternoon to appear in front of the Ministry to show support.

13. (SBU) At 1:30 PM MBR delivered the letter to the

Ministry. She made a point of waiting for a response. At 6:00 PM an official came out of the Ministry, crossed the street and read off a paper to the group. He stated that the Ministry would respond to the letter in the future and asked the group to disperse. The group of 7 (2 others went to a local cafeteria to drink coffee) refused to do so. Within minutes a group of about 100 Communist party activists arrived and held an "act of repudiation". Laura Pollan stated that the two groups were kept well separated and that the crowd confined themselves to yelling a few standard insults such as "worms" and "mercenaries". Laura stated that this is far different from many instances in the past where such government organized mobs routinely used violence and threats of harm against dissidents with impunity. Laura then said that the police arrived and packed the demonstrators into a bus. MBR and initially Bertha resisted being placed on the bus. Bertha decided to comply but after MBR persistently refused to move, police roughly shoved her on the bus inflicting several scratches on her arms (viewed the next day by Pol Off). Laura said that overall the authorities were polite and restrained and delivered people one by one at their doorsteps.

14. (SBU) In the meantime 36 others were stopped by police or security agents before they could get to the protest. This included six independent journalist who were ordered to remain in their homes. Police brought some of the dissidents home, others were brought to the police station and held for periods from a few hours to 18 hours before being released. Two women, Idania Yanes Contreras and Yastmi Elena Mena Zurbano allege that police struck them when they forced them to submit to a strip search. Police stopped well known dissident Jorge Luis Garcia Perez Antunez at 5:00 AM at the Havana train station when he arrived with six others to take

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part in the protest. He was roughly shoved into a police car and taken to a local station where he stayed in a filthy cell until 12:00 noon. He stated that then a nine vehicle police caravan escorted them back to the city of Santa Clara. On arrival Antunez stated that he yelled "Long Live Human Rights!" to his companions in other police cars and a police officer hit him with a gun butt. The police then brought him home. No charges have been filed against anyone connected with the demonstration.

15. (C) Comment: A number of our contacts in the dissident community have commented on apparent pattern of restraint on the part of authorities. There is a reluctance to arrest protesters. Police actions instead are aimed at minimizing the participation in protests. Despite some unnecessary roughness against dissidents who resist, the police and the mobs recruited for "acts of repudiation" are avoiding the public displays of brutality that were common in the past against peaceful protesters. The GOC had been indifferent in the past when such actions caused international outrage. Now the authorities appear reluctant to add to the number of political prisoners. The regime may be seeking to court opinion, not only internationally but for those Cubans who believe that Raul Castro's speech of July 26th indicates that he is contemplating reforms. The regime has given no indication that it is willing to give up central control of any aspect of Cuban life. However, some dissidents are seeing a window of opportunity. MBR is delighted by the amount of international press she received for her protest. She wants to set an example for the many people in the opposition who have been reluctant to organize street protests. She wants to organize more such events quickly and is confident they will attract a greatly increased number of participants.

PARMLY